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ABSTRACT

This paper sets forth step-by-step procedures which novice sign-language theatre directors can use as a guide for their first sign-language theatre experiences. Since the procedures were developed during the production of a play for a mixed adult and child audience, it is assumed that the general guidelines set forth are applicable to a production for any age group. It is also assumed that the audience for any sign-language theatre production includes hearing people, as well as deaf and hearing-impaired people. The paper is divided into nine chapters, which deal with the following topics: selecting a play, selecting a theatre, selecting a sign-language system, initial preparation, selecting production assistants, designing the production, auditions, rehearsal schedule, and publicity. (GW)

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CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

A PROCEDURE FOR DIRECTING A SIGN-LANGUAGE
THEATRE PRODUCTION FOR A CHILD AUDIENCE

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in

Theatre

by

Darlene Kaye Allen

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ABSTRACT

A PROCEDURE FOR DIRECTING A SIGN-LANGUAGE THEATRE PRODUCTION FOR A CHILD AUDIENCE

by

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Master of Arts in Theatre

June, 1977

Although sign-language theatre was first developed at Gallaudet College early in the twentieth century, it was not until the appearance of the National Theatre of the Deaf in 1967 that this style of production emerged as a popular art form. While increasing numbers of sign-language productions are being presented in the United States, to my knowledge there are no published procedures designed to provide the novice sign-language theatre director with systematic guidelines for directing this unusual style of theatre.

The goal of this thesis is to set forth, in step-by-step fashion, procedures which a director could use to guide him through his first sign-language theatre experience. Because there are few skilled directors upon whom

a beginner can depend for guidance, a practical 'checklist' of possible directing techniques could be invaluable as a starting point from which the director inexperienced in sign-language theatre could develop his own production concept and rehearsal technique.

The sign-language theatre production, The Witch's Lullaby, was directed to provide a means by which previously determined procedures could be refreshed in the director's mind and new ideas could be tested. The production served to facilitate the writing of what is intended to be a practical and effective guide which includes both technical and human aspects of the directing process.

INTRODUCTION

'Sign-language theatre' is defined as "any production which begins with a text originally written for spoken theatre (such as Hamlet, Death of a Salesman, Fiddler on the Roof, and so on), or with selected items of literature (poetry or prose), and arranges this work for simultaneous presentation in spoken language and in the sign language used by deaf persons in that country or locality."¹ In the United States, the sign systems include American Sign Language, signed English, and a number of offshoots aimed at a precise visual representation of English parts of speech (SEE I, SEE II, LOVE, etc.).

Ameslan

The sign language that is used by the deaf in the United States, much of Canada, and parts of Mexico is known as American Sign Language, abbreviated A.S.L. and commonly called, Ameslan.

The first thing that must be said about Ameslan is that it is a "full language as it stands."² It fulfills the requirements of a genuine language as stated by Ervin-Tripp: "Any symbolic system which is learned, which consists of conventional basic units and rules for their arrangement, and which includes a conventional set of arbitrary signs for meanings and referents."³ Ronald Langacker reminds us that a language "is not sound waves

in air; a language is the competence, the set of principles mastered by a speaker in which resides his grasp of an infinite set of sentences."⁴

Perhaps the greatest difference that Ameslan has from English is its syntax. The order of signs in Ameslan sentences is governed by rules that are quite different from those that govern the syntax in English sentences. Ameslan divides the sentence into three main parts and sequences them in the order in which they visually occur.

"The first part of the sentence is usually the sign, commonly a noun, that is the most concrete. Included here is that which is visually most vivid, that which sets the scene, or establishes a framework for the rest of the sentence."⁵

For example, in the sentence: 'I get sick at the sight of blood,' the blood must be seen before the person can become sick. Therefore, the sentence would be signed, 'blood see, I become sick.'

Solow continues: "Next in the sentence comes the signs which in some way describe, explain, or elaborate the stimulus. Usually these are adjectives, adverbs, and verbs. For example: 'I couldn't see, because the man in front of me was too big.' The stimulus is 'the man' and the description is 'in front of me was too big'."⁶ This sentence would be signed, 'Man, in-front, big, I couldn't see.'

"After the description of the stimulus comes the result, the product, or a state of being. In the sentence, 'The little boy was excited by the pageantry of the parade', the stimulus is 'the parade', the descriptive part is 'the pageantry' and the result is 'the little boy was excited'."⁷ Thus in Ameslan the sentence would be signed: 'Parade pageantry, boy become excited.'

Fingerspelling (consisting of a specific hand configuration for each letter of the English alphabet) is rarely used in Ameslan, and is usually reserved for proper nouns.

W. C. Stokoe, in his article entitled "A Classroom Experimentation in Two Languages," estimates Ameslan to have about 4,000 signs while English is known to have about 450,000 words. This shows a ratio of about one sign to each 150 words, when total vocabularies are compared, but this does not make Ameslan any less of a language. This ratio does not account for multiple signs used to express a concept, like the signs 'king + control + land + over,' which convey the concept 'kingdom.' However, translation is not just a matter of substituting a sign for a word. For example, the English question 'Have you eaten yet?' and its response 'No, have you?' would be signed 'Eat finish (question indicator)' and 'Not-yet you (question indicator).'

The above is a very brief description of Ameslan. It

is by no means complete, but it may provide the reader with some insight as to how it functions as a language.

Signed English

Most of the sign language that hearing observers see, including classroom interpreting, is not Ameslan, but signed English. It is a visual, conceptual form of the English language and follows the English grammatical system. Signed English substitutes Ameslan signs for English words and usually includes fingerspelled words as well as signs, although tense, plurality, and word endings are deleted.

SEE I, SEE II, and LOVE

In 1962 David Anthony, a deaf man, was working on the Deaf Research Project at Lapeer State Hospital, Michigan. He found there was no sign for everyday nouns like 'sack,' 'sponge,' or 'vegetable' and there were no signs for such words as 'quite,' 'sort,' or 'the.' He also found that a single word such as 'bear' could be represented by many signs. It is signed one way for the animal, another way to mean patience, a third to convey the concept of responsibility, and a fourth to communicate 'to bear a child.' Furthermore, he found that he had to use one sign to represent many words with the same root but different functions; 'love,' 'lovely,' 'loveliness;' and this same sign was used for the synonyms like 'beautiful,' 'pretty,' 'attractive.'⁸

Anthony saw these aspects of Ameslan as problems and started to work on developing a sign language system called Signing Essential English (SEE I). By 1969, a group of interested teachers, interpreters and parents had formed an organization for the purpose of developing signs to represent English.

Because of varied reasoning and differing ideologies, several members of the group branched off and began to produce separate systems of their own. In 1971 David Wampler published "Linguistics of Visual English" (LOVE); in the same year David Anthony published "Seeing Essential English" (SEE I); and in 1972 Gerilee Gustason and others published "Signing Exact English" (SEE II).

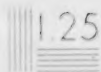
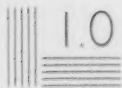
All of these systems adhere to the principle that for 'basic' words there are three characteristics: meaning, spelling, and sound. A 'basic' word is defined as a word that has no affixes attached to it. When it came to deciding whether or not to treat a word as one or more signs, as in the word 'bear,' the criterion was that if any two of the characteristics were the same, (spelling + sound, sound + meaning, or meaning + spelling), then the word would use the same sign. This is intended to steer the deaf student away from the conceptual meaning of a sign and to treat it the same way as it would be in English. Thus the word 'bear,' regardless of the meaning, would always be represented by the same sign. If any two

of the characteristics are different, such as the word boy, as in a young boy, and the word buoy, as in a life buoy, where the meanings and spellings differ, the signs assigned would be different.

All of these systems (SEE I, SEE II, and LOVE) follow correct English syntax and also stress the importance of simultaneous speaking and signing.

For the remainder of this paper, whenever the word 'sign' is used, it will refer to a gesture included in one of the standard sign systems described above. General gestures as used commonly by hearing people will only be referred to as 'signs' when the gesture is also an established sign in a standard sign system (as in the movement of the whole hand flicking away from the body to mean 'go'). Pure pantomime is often used in conversational Ameslan, and is regularly used on stage while performing in Ameslan and at times with signed English, so it will be referred to simply as pantomime. The term 'sign-mime' will be used when referring to altering signs through pantomime (using the established sign for tree, but then dropping the hand down to give the impression of a weeping willow, or 'a tree that droops,' for example).

The sign-language theatre production, The Witch's Lullaby, was directed in order to provide a means by which previously determined procedures could be refreshed in the director's mind and new ideas could be tested. Because



the play was directed for a mixed adult and child audience it is assumed that the general guidelines set forth are applicable to any age. It is also assumed that the audience for any sign-language theatre production consists of both hearing and hearing-impaired people. Both deaf and hard-of-hearing people will be included under the category of hearing-impaired (H-I).

It is necessary to emphasize that the procedures and ideas that follow are the suggestions of the author and may not be agreed upon or followed by other directors in the field.

CHAPTER 1

SELECTING A PLAY

Play selection for a sign-language theatre production includes all matters which must be considered if the performance were not to take place in sign language, plus the added considerations discussed in this chapter. Some of the special problems of play selection the director of a sign-language theatre must face are treated below.

I. Action vs. Words

A. Usually the more action on stage, the more a hearing-impaired (H-I) audience will enjoy the performance.

1. Actors standing in one place signing to each other for an extended period of time will lose audience attention.
2. Plays where major action happens off-stage and characters only DISCUSS what happened are not as desirable as plays where all dramatic action occurs on stage.

B. An abstract or 'wordy' script need not always be rejected.

1. Extensive cutting may be possible, allowing the play to move at a more desirable pace.

2. Interesting visual effects and action imposed by the director may overcome the tediousness of long speeches.

C. Scripts based on English puns USUALLY do not translate well into sign language.

1. Many verbal puns are based on sound, which obviously cannot easily be conveyed on the hands.
2. Malapropisms are difficult to convey with sign language.
3. Do not, however, immediately assume a pun or play on words cannot be coped with. For example, at first glance, Ionesco's The Bald Soprano seems to deal extensively with presenting a satire on the English language, but with a little work, visual representation of what is being said can be found.

II. Visual representation of elements which are usually non-visual

A. Off-stage sounds must somehow be shown on stage.

1. If a play greatly depends upon off-stage sounds, it may not be a wise choice. For instance, the effect of a play such as Ionesco's Rhinoceros may be badly damaged if the rhinos offstage are not heard.

2. In The Witch's Lullaby, bagpipes had to be heard in the distance. To achieve this effect the actor walked across a backlit scrim playing bagpipes. This communicated both the act of playing and the distance factor.
- B. Telephone conversations are not possible in a sign-language production.
1. They must be cut, or substituted with messengers, letters, telegrams, etc.
 2. The assistance of scrims and special effects may be needed here.
- C. Lighting can be helpful in suggesting on-stage sounds.
1. Blinking lights are used for doorbells.
 2. Psychedelic lighting which changes with varying rhythms is an effective representation of music.
 3. Lightning is a visual representation of thunder.
- D. If finding or fabricating such visual representations becomes too cumbersome, it would be wise to chose another script.

III. Musicals

- A. If the majority of the audience is to be deaf people, a musical may not be the best choice of material. The musical will be thoroughly enjoyed only if a large proportion of the audience can

hear or are only hard-of-hearing.

- B. If the lyrics are witty enough to be enjoyed apart from the music, or if the musical can be presented with extensive choreography, then it may be acceptable for a large deaf audience.

You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown is a good example of a musical with lyrics that can be enjoyed without hearing the music.

- C. If the theatre allows the hearing-impaired audience to feel the vibrations of the music, the enjoyment will be increased.

1. The smaller the theatre, the better the vibration transference.
2. If the audience can be seated upon a good conductor, that is, wood as opposed to concrete, the music will be enjoyed to a greater degree. Having just the feet or arms in contact with a good conductor is sufficient.
3. Experiments with audience members holding balloons to aid in sensitivity to vibrations have been conducted.
 - a. The general response was positive; the balloons did transfer vibrations successfully.
 - b. Depending on such 'gimmicks' is not suggested. They serve as a distraction,

and the possibility of breakage must also be considered.

4. Music with a strong bass 'carries' best.

IV. Thought-provoking vs. Light Entertainment

- A. Obviously there is room for both of these types of entertainment in sign-language theatre, depending upon the audience and the director's goals.
- B. Recent years have seen a trend in both professional and non-professional sign-language theatre groups towards thought-provoking and away from light entertainment.
 1. This has been rationalized by asserting that the theatre is striving to develop a more sophisticated audience among H-I people.
 2. The lack of quantity of sign-language theatre performances makes the above reasoning a mistake.
 - a. Having only occasional opportunities to see a play performed in sign language, the average H-I audience member probably would prefer to sit back and enjoy the evening without having to strain to understand what is happening on stage.
 - b. Choosing material which is more sophisticated than the audience should be attempted

only when their need for pure entertainment, their desire to escape everyday problems, has been satiated.

- 1) The general H-I audience member constantly struggles to understand in daily life. If he does not understand what goes on in the theatre, he probably will not return.
- 2) This is not meant to undervalue the intelligence and sensibility of the H-I audience. The situation can be likened to that of any hearing person who has not been given the opportunity to learn to enjoy the theatre before being forced to encounter play after play which has little meaning or enjoyment for him. He, too, usually will not return to the theatre.

V. Casting Limitations

- A. Adding narrators can as much as double the casting requirements.
- B. If many people who are not fluent in sign language must be cast, consider a short play.
- C. The more flexible the cast of characters, the better.

1. Because more females than males usually audition for a production, check the possibility of changing some male characters to female.
2. Because requiring both a narrator and a signer for each character increases the number of actors required, determine whether characters can be deleted or if several can be blended into one.

CHAPTER 2

SELECTING A THEATRE

Often a director has no choice as to the size or shape of his stage space. If he does not, he may be able to adjust the theatre he is given to avoid problem areas discussed in this chapter.

I. Size

A. The smaller the house, the better the theatre experience will be.

1. The more easily expressions are seen, the more enjoyable the performance.
2. If one is using a sign system which requires lipreading, a small theatre is absolutely necessary. Lip movements will not carry in a house seating over approximately eighty persons.

B. Sight-lines are crucial.

1. Signing actors must be fully visible to all members of the audience.
2. Theatre-in-the-round is next to impossible to stage successfully.
3. The proscenium theatre provides ideal sight lines, but it usually affords less intimate seating, resulting in a loss of expression

and vibrations.

4. These pros and cons of theatre selection must be weighed individually by each director, depending on the requirements and goals of his specific production.

C. Visual acuity is important.

1. Check lighting limitations. The actors must be seen to be understood.
2. Theatres with light colored curtains, legs, and teasers allow little contrast to light-skinned actors and cause difficulties in understanding signs, and black curtains cause the same problem for a dark-skinned cast. Be aware of the need for a contrasting background.

CHAPTER 3

SELECTING A SIGN LANGUAGE SYSTEM

A sign language system for the production must be selected by the director well in advance of auditions. If the director is not fluent in sign language, he obviously must consult with the production assistants who will be helping with the translation process before making his decision.

I. Audience requirements

A. The child audience is exposed to a variety of sign systems.

1. Although SEE signs are used in many schools, they often entail three to four signs for each English word. This becomes quite awkward and slow for stage use and therefore is not advocated here.
2. Signed English is understood by most H-I children and is a safe choice residing neatly between SEE and Ameslan.
3. Ameslan may not be understood by young H-I children with hearing parents, or H-I parents who support SEE signs. If, however, the play's story line is known by the children, or is made obvious through the general action

on stage, the director may prefer Ameslan as a more theatrically expressive medium.

B. Highly-educated adults are usually bilingual.

1. Most are fluent in English and may prefer signed English.
2. Most are fluent in Ameslan, unless they were trained orally and have only recently learned, or are in the process of learning, sign language.

C. The average H-I adults are not bilingual.

1. Most are not fluent in English.
2. Ameslan is preferred here.

II. The Production Goal

- A. Is sign language to be used primarily as a means of communication or as an art form?
- B. If it is to be communication, then the director must choose whichever sign system the majority of his audience feels most comfortable with.
- C. If one has no idea who his audience will be, Ameslan would be the usual choice, for it allows the most freedom in translation and blends best with pure pantomime, sign-mime and general gestures.

III. To mouth or not to mouth?

- A. Mouthing is the process of silently speaking English words while signing. It allows lip-

reading to accompany the signing and enhances the communication process.

- B. If SEE or signed English is used, mouthing is a necessity and should always accompany the signs.
- C. Mouthing while signing Ameslan is controversial.
 - 1. One method is to sign Ameslan while mouthing English.
 - a. Proponents say that this method allows H-I people not fluent in Ameslan to understand through lipreading the English.
 - b. Opponents say that communicating with one language on the hands and another on the mouth is confusing, both to the audience member who reads both lipreading and signs and to the actor required to do both.
 - 2. A second method is to sign and mouth Ameslan simultaneously.
 - a. Proponents say that if one does not comprehend the sign on the hands he may catch it on the mouth; or if one does not know the sign, the lip movement may clarify it.
 - b. Opponents say that if a person is not fluent in signing Ameslan, mouthing Ameslan will not be an aid to communication. Ameslan does not follow English syntax; therefore

the language itself must be understood to benefit from corresponding lip movements.

3. The final choice is not to require that words be 'mouthed.'

- a. Eliminating 'mouthing' does not mean clamping the mouth tight and never moving it, but it does mean that the actor need not mouth each word or sign.
- b. Opponents of mouthing say that lipreading does not carry past the first few rows in the house, while natural facial expression does. Freeing the mouth, rather than confining it to the small movements involved in saying words, carries more meaning to a larger portion of the audience. It may also increase the concentration and intensity of the actor, allowing him to communicate more fully through body language, since his attention is not divided between body and mouth. However, many signs are characteristically accompanied by rather unusual mouth and tongue movements. Many directors feel that if an occasional word is mouthed in this context, the lip movement is natural to the accompanying facial expression because it occurs spontaneously.

c. Proponents of mouthing say that many H-I people depend a great deal upon reading lips with the signs, and depriving them of this added means of communication greatly inhibits the scope of the production's audience appeal.

D. Whatever the director decides in this instance, he must be sure it is what HE thinks is best for his specific production, for it is almost certain that he will not please everyone in the audience on this point.

IV. Fingerspelling

- A. Fingerspelling should be avoided whenever possible.
- B. It does not carry much farther than mouthing does.
- C. If it cannot be avoided, or if the director wants to use fingerspelling for an effect, try to have it presented in as large and slow a manner as possible to facilitate readability.

CHAPTER 4

INITIAL PREPARATION

The order in which the initial preparation occurs may vary depending upon the needs of each individual director and production. The director may decide to set the rehearsal schedule before cutting the script, for example. The director may also decide to delegate typing the script to a production assistant, although the author has performed this task herself, using it as an opportunity to become further familiar with the script. This, of course, is directly influenced by the ease with which the director can type.

I. Cutting the Script

- A. Only cut large, glaring problems and only change the English if it causes obvious difficulties. As a general rule, small problems usually work themselves out during translation rehearsals.
- B. However, do not be afraid to cut when it is clearly necessary; and remember to cut as many characters as possible, or at least know how the cast can be cut in case too few people audition.
- C. Entrances and exits must be left in to avoid confusion as to which scenes each actor

participates in. Often an actor can play an important role on stage whether he has written dialogue or not.

- D. Anything which slows the pace unnecessarily should be cut.
- E. If a word, or line, or portion of the script does not translate well and is not vital to the play, cut it.
- F. If something does not translate well and IS vital to the play, keep it in and do the best you can with it.
- G. Long speeches should be shortened as much as possible.
- H. When it is possible, references to sounds should be changed to visual references. For example: 'Did you hear? A pig squealed,' can easily be changed to 'Did you see? A pig ran by.'
- I. Objects which will obviously cause problems in translation can be changed to things which are equally acceptable to the story but are easier to translate. In The Witch's Lullaby a pinch of snuff was a necessary ingredient for a spell, but would have been difficult to sign and would have very little meaning to a modern child audience. A white rat was used in the spell instead of the snuff; it made more sense and

foreshadowed the use of a white rat later in the play.

J. Short nonsensical songs may be fun to hear, but can prove confusing to a H-I audience. Such songs can either be cut, or lines which have a positive contribution to make to the play can be extracted and used as dialogue.

K. If a passage requires fingerspelling, either cut it or alter it if at all possible.

II. Typing the Script

A. Because signs which will be used must be written in by the actors, double- or triple-spaced scripts must be provided.

B. Once cut, the entire script must be typed for duplication.

1. Keep the masters after the scripts have been run off. If more scripts are needed, retyping will not be necessary.

2. The director, assistant directors, and perhaps some actors will need two scripts: one for the translation, and one for the blocking.

III. The Rehearsal Schedule

A. Usually sign-language theatre productions require approximately twice the rehearsal time of a hearing production. Besides rehearsing character

development and blocking, as in a hearing production, the director must deal with:

1. Adapting the script to sign language.
2. Teaching any actor who has no previous experience with sign language the signs needed for his role. The author has NEVER worked with a cast in which every person cast had a knowledge of sign language; do not expect such a perfect situation to exist.
3. Delicate timing must be achieved if narrators and signers are to blend into individualized characters.

B. Allow six to eight weeks of rehearsal, depending upon the length of the play, the experience of the actors, and the complexity of the material.

C. Very generally, a rehearsal schedule for an Ameslan production could be set up as follows:

1. Allow two weeks for translating. Less time would be needed for a signed English production since this does not involve translating from one language to another.
2. One week should be set aside to allow narrators and signers to work on characterization and timing.
3. There should be one 'flexible' week to work on problems which may have arisen.

4. Two weeks are required for blocking.
 - a. Blocking occurs after translating and narrator/signer timing rehearsals because much blocking is determined by the choice of signs, and narrator/signer synchronization must be established before working on the timing involved in moving during a line.
 - b. This phase includes setting the blocking, solving problems, and working on individual scenes or acts; no continuity has yet been established.
5. One week of run-throughs must follow to allow the production to develop continuity.
6. Technical rehearsals may require more than one week.
 - a. The director may decide to have one and a half or two weeks of technical rehearsals, since the visual elements are of such great importance in a sign-language production.
 - b. Technical elements can be phased in through this period.
7. These scheduling guidelines are very general, and include much overlapping of areas.

Rehearsals will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 8.

CHAPTER 5

SELECTING PRODUCTION ASSISTANTS

Production assistants should have the same qualifications expected of their counterparts in standard productions. It is also suggested that they have the added expertise to assume the responsibilities discussed in this chapter.

- I. Two assistant directors--one for signers, one for narrators.
 - A. This allows the director to separate the cast into two groups, each working with an assistant director, thus freeing the director to move from group to group as necessary.
 - B. The assistant director for signers should have the following qualifications and assignments:
 - 1. He is preferably a H-I person, but can be hearing if need be.
 - 2. He must be fluent in the sign system being used.
 - 3. He must have some theatrical experience, preferably in sign-language theatre.
 - 4. His duties are:
 - a. To assist with the translation of the script.

- b. While working separately from the narrators, to take over the director's responsibilities during the absence of the director.
 - c. While working signers and narrators together, to stay on the book and be prepared to cue the signers, freeing the director to concentrate on blocking and characterization.
 - d. To take notes on characterization and clarity of signs, since it is difficult for the director to see and hear everything, especially during tech week when he will most likely be preoccupied with technical aspects of the production.
- C. The assistant director for narrators should have the following qualifications and assignments:
- 1. He must be a hearing person or a hard-of-hearing person who has sufficient residual hearing to enable him to evaluate narrators' voices.
 - 2. He need not be a fluent signer, although it helps.
 - 3. He must have some theatrical experience, preferably in sign-language theatre.
 - 4. His duties are:

- a. To assist with translation of script, if possible.
 - b. While working separately from the signers, to take over the director's responsibilities during the absence of the director.
 - c. While working signers and narrators together, to stay on the book and be prepared to cue the narrators, freeing the director to concentrate on blocking and characterization.
 - d. To take notes on characterization, projection and clarity of diction.
- D. During blocking rehearsals, both assistant directors are responsible for writing down the blocking.

II. Stage Manager

- A. He should know sign language.
 - 1. If he does not know sign language, he must attend rehearsals regularly and learn enough signs to give cues back stage, make the H-I actors feel comfortable, and be able to handle any emergency which might arise.
 - 2. Stage manager skills should take precedence over signing skills. Signs can be taught quickly, managerial experience cannot.

- B. He must be prepared to handle more entrance cues if the H-I actors cannot see the stage to receive their cue lines.

III. Set, Costume and Lighting Designers; Production Technical Director

- A. They should have a knowledge of sign-language theatre, but need not know sign language.
- B. If designers with this experience cannot be found, it is imperative that the ones chosen can and will adjust to the special requirements of a sign-language production, since visual elements carry added significance in this form of theatre.

IV. Stage Crews and House Personnel

- A. One member of each crew should have a knowledge of signs to ensure precise cue delivery.
- B. The house manager and, ideally, one usher for each performance should be fluent in sign language.

CHAPTER 6

DESIGNING THE PRODUCTION

Designing a sign-language theatre production only differs from standard productions in the area of emphasis: productions in sign language call for technical effects that emphasize visual expressiveness.

I. Settings

- A. The stage should enhance the visibility of the signing. This implies a simple background, with an avoidance of colors or patterns that could produce visual distractions.
- B. There is no objection to an elaborate set if it does not distract from the signing.
- C. If scene changes are to take place during a blackout, special attention should be given to speed, since a H-I person who is not used to the theatre may become uncomfortable during an extended blackout when he is deprived of his sense of sight.
- D. Incorporating a variety of levels in the set can aid the visibility of signs, thereby allowing more freedom in blocking.

II. Costumes

- A. As with settings, costumes should enhance the

visibility of the signs.

B. Details, particularly sleeves, should not interfere with free signing.

1. Sleeves which are too full and tend to balloon are very distracting.

2. Sleeves which are too tight can hinder movement.

3. Sleeveless costumes and plunging necklines can result in seeing skin against skin, providing no contrast to allow the hands to be seen.

C. Designs that offer simple lines and one-color tops are most effective.

D. Colors should not glare, but can be bright if they provide contrast to the hands and face, and are in harmony with each other and the set.

E. Hats, hoods, wigs, etc., must be watched carefully to be sure they do not shadow or hide facial expressions.

F. Gloves can be used to aid contrast, but obviously must fit perfectly.

G. Special effects can be achieved through costuming.

1. Garbled speech can be suggested by signing with mittens or under capes.

2. Hoods and hats can be pulled in front of the eyes if one character does not wish to 'listen'

to another.

3. Use the imagination; the possibilities here are endless.

III. Lighting

A. Visibility should be the first concern.

1. Dim lighting creates eyestrain for the H-I audience and may ruin their enjoyment of a production.
2. Here, at all times, communication must override artistic concerns.

B. This does not imply that lighting must be flat and untheatrical, but simply that everything must easily be seen. Having guaranteed visibility, one is free to add whatever artistic effects he desires.

1. Please see Chapter 1 for several uses of lighting which are concerned with making non-visual elements become visual.
2. Light is also an invaluable tool for shifting attention.
 - a. This serves an even greater function than in hearing theatre. Here a spoken line cannot be depended upon to attract attention. The attention must shift before the line, or the signs will not be seen and the line,

and many that follow, will be lost completely.

- b. In The Witch's Lullaby, a green glow appeared at the fireplace before the witches entered. Although no lines were said immediately, the impact of an important moment in the drama would have been lost if the first entrance had been missed.

3. Lighting can be used to establish atmosphere which would normally be accomplished through sound.

- a. The key to success in using atmospheric lighting is finding a compromise which allows the special lighting to be effective while keeping the dialogue visible.

- b. In The Witch's Lullaby, while one witch was conducting a spell, spooky music played while a red 'special' made her glow eerily. This is one instance where the effect had to succumb slightly to visual requirements. The general lighting could not be brought down as much as the lighting designer would have wished because dialogue immediately followed the spell.

4. Backlighting can add a great deal to sign-language productions. Again in The Witch's

Lullaby, two witches chanted from a rocky ledge: "Fie on sister, fie on sister. You'll dangle from a tree and die." To achieve a diabolical effect the witches were behind a screen, backlit red, signing at the sides of their bodies, so that arm and hand movements could be discerned.

5. Blacklights can be effective for limiting visibility to hands or faces alone.
6. Strobe lights should be used with care to avoid eye strain.
7. Multi-media techniques have been used successfully.
 - a. Slides can be used to establish a pre-show mood; childhood photographs have provided background while actors related personal experiences in sign language.
 - b. Film can be used to convey information that might normally come from a soundtrack.
 - c. The limitless possibilities of using such effects are only suggested here to provide a challenge to the imagination and ingenuity of the director and designers.

IV. Make-up

- A. Because facial expression is vitally important in understanding sign language, stage make-up for

signing characters must highlight features to convey subtle as well as broad effects.

B. In the case of narrators who also appear on stage as apparently non-speaking characters, make-up must minimize facial expression. For example, in The Witch's Lullaby, three narrators portrayed black cats. Black-face make-up extended over their mouths, making the lips barely visible, consequently lessening the distraction of seeing talking cats.

C. Masks would logically appear to be a bad choice for sign-language theatre, since they result in a total loss of facial expression. Nonetheless, masks and related devices have been used effectively.

1. Full mask has been used for an ancient Greek play, and, although no mask was changed, audience members thought the actors changed masks during the course of the play, for they seemed to alter as the characters changed moods.
2. Stick puppets have been made to come alive when actors stood behind them, allowing only their arms to show. In this way, human arms blended with puppet heads and bodies, allowing the 'puppets' to sign. Although they had to be

made painstakingly clear, the signs were easily understood.

- D. No make-up device or technique can be assumed to be impossible until it has been tried and proved to fail.

V. Sound Effects

- A. Every sound effect must be given a visual representation (see Chapter 1, Section II).
- B. Because sign language theatre draws mixed audiences of deaf, hard-of-hearing and hearing people, sound effects must be planned and executed as carefully as they would be for a hearing audience.
 - 1. So much emphasis is put on the visual elements of a sign-language production that many times the sound element is neglected. Do not make this mistake!
 - 2. Hearing members of the audience must be provided the stimulation of music and background noises. Furthermore, without sound effects, hard-of-hearing people will feel that something is missing, although they may not be able to state specifically what it is.

CHAPTER 7

AUDITIONS

This chapter describes three aspects of the audition process: preparing audition material, developing specific procedures to organize successful auditions and suggestions for evaluating the people who are auditioning. It is important to remember that the foundation for a cooperative and harmonious working relationship must be laid before rehearsals begin. A well-organized audition period will be a definite asset to any production.

I. Scheduling Auditions

A. Space and equipment needs must be considered.

1. Because movement, pantomime and improvisations play an important role in the audition proceedings a spacious audition area is a necessity.
2. Since hands must be free to sign during auditions, music stands should be used to hold the scripts.

B. Plan to have a series of auditions for every production. This is needed for the director to see as many combinations of signers and narrators

as possible and to check the sign-retention ability of non-signers.

1. At least three 'open' auditions should be scheduled. It is desirable to have each auditioner attend more than one audition. Scheduling less than three 'open' auditions would not make an allowance for the possibility of an auditioner being unable to attend one audition session.
2. The number of 'call-back' auditions varies with each production. If many auditioners attended all the 'open' auditions, perhaps only one 'call-back' audition would be sufficient. If many auditioners only attended one or two 'open' auditions, two 'call-backs' would be required.

C. The role of assistant directors in the audition process requires that they be prepared to observe and later to consult with the director on casting decisions.

II. Preparing for Auditions

- A. Have an 'audition packet' available one week prior to auditions. This packet should contain a variety of material.
 1. Include the portions of the script which will be used for audition scenes. This allows

people who are able to do so to translate material into sign language before they must audition.

2. Because only portions of the script are made available, include a brief plot synopsis.
3. Include information about the sign language system which will be used in the production. Many people have strong beliefs as to which systems should or should not be used on stage. Prior knowledge of which sign system will be used can avoid conflicts at auditions.
4. Clearly explain audition procedures for both signers and non-signers.
 - a. Regardless of the system being used for performance, auditioning signers should translate as much of the script as possible into whichever sign system they are most comfortable using, concentrating on the roles they most desire. Since rehearsal time is allotted for careful and uniform translation, auditioners should be instructed to concentrate on character development, not their hands, during auditions.
 - b. While non-signers should be encouraged to consider narrators' roles, they should also

be encouraged to audition signing roles through pantomime.

5. Auditioners should be invited to come to as many auditions as possible.

- B. Prepare material to be used for pantomime improvisations (see II B below).
- C. Translate scenes for non-signers (see II B below).
- D. Please see Appendix for sample audition forms and information.

III. Audition Procedures

- A. As previously discussed, allow people to use whichever sign system they feel most comfortable using.
- B. Do not limit auditions to people who have a previous knowledge of sign language.
 - 1. Use pantomime improvisations to evaluate the actors' physical capabilities for character portrayal.
 - 2. Translate short sections of the script using a few simple signs, and teach those signs to each auditioner who knows no signs; assistant directors can be helpful here.
- C. Ask non-signers to return to the next audition session to find out how well they retain the signs learned.

- D. Do not limit narrators' auditions to the sex of the signer. Because of small attendance at auditions for The Witch's Lullaby, a man was asked to read a witch's voice so that there would be a narrator for the character. He did such a fine job he was finally cast as the most evil witch's narrator and did an excellent job.
- E. Usually signers are limited to being cast as characters who correctly correspond to the actor's sex. Casting signers in roles of the opposite sex requires a VERY skilled signer/actor. The Witch's Lullaby had too few male auditioners. One female who auditioned had a 'Peter Pan' quality, which, in a hearing production, could have allowed her to play a young boy. However, her signs clearly read 'female.' After experimenting at auditions it was determined that it was impossible for her to pass as a male. This may not always be the case, but caution must be exercised.
- F. Let prospective narrators know what is expected of them BEFORE they accept parts.
1. Being a narrator can be one of the most difficult and thankless jobs in a sign-language production.

2. A narrator must be able to work hard, stay in the background, and always put the play first.
3. If narrators are becoming strange inanimate objects, such as clocks, statues or deer heads, they must be able to accept these unusual conventions without feeling silly and self-conscious on stage.

G. A narrator can be double cast if his characters never need to talk with each other.

H. If there is time for costume and make-up changes, a versatile actor can be cast as a signer in one scene and a narrator in another.

IV. Casting

A. Evaluate auditioners on overall qualities, not on sign selections.

1. The only difference between a hearing production's casting requirements and those of a sign-language production is that in the latter the actors are more at the mercy of their physical limitations.

a. The shape of the hands has a great deal to do with the effect an individual's signs has on the audience. . If a person with

very short, broad fingers is auditioning for the part of a witch, he simply will not be successful in the part. The fingers must look evil, and claw-like, unless, of course, the witch is comical or good, in which case the fingers can have a softer appearance.

- b. Because sign language is very physical, involving a great deal of body language, the actor must be physically expressive and flexible.

2. Scrutinize the style of signing. Each person will immediately exhibit his own style, even when using minimal signing.

- a. Do NOT expect to change a person's style of signing.
 - 1. As a rule, only an experienced actor-signer can change his signing style at will.
 - 2. A person can be asked to change his style; if he can immediately, it may be safe to cast him, but if he cannot, do not plan to 'work on it.'
- b. Match style with character. For example, an actor who has a smooth, delicate style of signing should not be cast as a witch.

c. Changing the size of signs can usually be accomplished successfully.

B. When evaluating non-signers look for speed and ease in learning the signs. The larger the part, the more crucial this aspect is.

C. Eye contact is important.

1. If an actor has trouble sustaining eye contact with other actors, be leery of casting him.
2. Signers who do not establish eye contact on stage appear to the audience to lack concentration.
3. Without eye contact, a signing actor cannot take visual cues from the other signers.
4. Signers must keep eye contact with other actors to keep alert for differing line deliveries from one performance to the next.

D. The importance of narrators must not be overlooked during auditions.

1. Signers and narrators must successfully blend to create individual characterizations.
 - a. The director strives to find a voice which matches the character and the body of each signer so perfectly that a hearing audience member who does not know signs will soon imagine that the signing actor is speaking and will not be aware of a separation of

body and voice.

b. The volume, quality, and timbre of the voice must seem logical for each character.

1) Do not cast a light voice with a heavy body, etc.

2) It does not matter what the signer's own voice sounds like. DO NOT listen to his voice and cast the closest match as his narrator, since the audience will never hear the signer's own voice. Match a voice that seems most logically to fit the signer's body and character.

2. Signer and narrator must be able to agree on characterization.

a. If they see the character going in opposite directions and are not flexible in their feelings, they must not be cast together.

b. Since signer and narrator must work very closely together, two people who exhibit a personality conflict should not be cast in the same role.

3. If the narrators are to be incorporated into the action on stage, their physical traits must be observed.

a. They must be able to limit physical expression while projecting complete vocal

characterization.

b. If they are to become objects or people on stage, they must be physically suited to those roles.

1. If they are to become black cats, they cannot be too large and should be able to move well, for instance.

2. If narrators are to become inanimate objects, the decision as to what kind of object each narrator should become would be influenced by the physical stature of each narrator. For example, a grandfather clock should be taller than a floor lamp.

CHAPTER 8

REHEARSAL SCHEDULE

An eight-week rehearsal schedule should follow the pattern set forth below.

TRANSLATING

2 weeks

NAR/SIG

1 week

FLEXIBLE

1 week

GENERAL BLOCKING

SPECIFIC BLOCKING

1 week

2 weeks

RUN-THROUGH

1 week

KEY: ———

Major Emphasis,

Secondary Emphasis

TECHNICAL

1 week

Following are guidelines for planning and conducting the seven phases of the rehearsal process:

I. Translation Rehearsals

- A. Translating the script must be the first order of business.
- B. Both signers and narrators must be present during translation.
- C. Have an initial cast meeting where complete scripts are distributed. Leave time between this cast meeting and the first translation rehearsal for people who know signs to develop ideas for translation.
- D. Translations MUST be written in pencil to allow for changes as rehearsals progress.
- E. It may prove beneficial to provide each actor with a second script for recording finalized translations.
- F. Although everyone in the cast may contribute to all character translations, the director must maintain final authority over all translation decisions.
- G. Translation rehearsals must be closed. This is a time when the actors are developing their characters and are not yet at ease with themselves, their parts or each other. Outside observers may inhibit the actors from arguing over translation choices, hindering a valuable character analysis process inherent in sign-

language theatre.

H. Transliterating into signed English is not as time consuming as translating into Ameslan.

1. However, there will still be a variety of signs from which to choose, and rehearsal time must be allowed to develop those choices.

2. Transliterating may not include as complete a character analysis as does translating into Ameslan. Thus additional time may be required for more extensive character analysis.

Although character analysis obviously continues throughout rehearsals for any production, a special period of time rarely needs to be allotted in an Ameslan production because of the study and analysis that occurs during the translation process.

I. The goal of translating a script should be to allow the H-I audience the same theatre experience as the hearing audience.

1. In Ameslan productions portions of the original script often seem to 'lose something in the translation.' No director should feel that these must always be cut; rather, they should be translated as clearly as possible.

2. In other cases an added dimension in the signs makes a line more effective than it was in the

original English. Do not feel that a translation must not be used because it adds a dimension which is not found in the English. There will also be dimensions in the English which will not be translatable into sign language. These instances should average each other out in the end.

J. Writing a translation is difficult.

1. There is no agreed-upon method for taking signs from the air and placing them on paper. Although most people cannot understand another person's written explanation, a few methods which have proved helpful are listed below.
2. Underline any word which is signed the same as it is seen on the paper: 'Oh no we wouldn't.'
3. Use parentheses with nothing written below if there is to be nothing signed for a word: '(Oh) no we wouldn't.' Do not cross out the word, since it may be important to know the exact English at a later date.
4. If a group of words is to be translated together, use parentheses and write the translation below: '(Oh) no (we wouldn't).'
 refuse
This sentence would be signed: 'No, refuse.'

5. If it takes more than one word to describe a sign, use hyphens to connect the words; thus it is clear that one sign is being used rather than many: '(If) (you're) (not out of my) you-two not-yet (way)...' gone

6. If a sign is to be repeated, use a coefficient to show how many times to repeat it:

'Three (of them).'
witch³

7. If a sign must be done specifically with the right or left hand, use an R or L coefficient:

'Three^L (of them).'
witch^{3R}

The sentence, 'Three of them.' would then be signed: the number three with the left hand and witch three times with the right hand.

8. Often there is no sign for what is being done.

The best thing in that case is to put the whole sentence in parentheses and write the clearest possible description underneath.

Sometimes simply the word 'mime' can indicate that the English is being pantomimed.

K. Do not forget the effectiveness of pantomime. In The Witch's Lullaby, one line for the Constable is "Burn her at the stake most likely." In place

of simply signing the line which would have been rather blasé, the actor pantomimed tying the witch (who was standing next to him) to a stake, piling wood at her feet, striking a match, and then he signed fire all around her. The narrator did not say the English words, but simply gave an evil laugh which built to a climax as the Constable signed 'fire.' This proved much more effective than signing the English words. Keep an open mind to ways which may be better for communicating ideas than signing.

II. Signer-Narrator Rehearsals

- A. It is important to allow narrators and signers an opportunity to rehearse without their 'other halves.' Let narrators rehearse as though it were a hearing production, and signers rehearse as though there were no narrators. This allows each person to become comfortable with his lines before imposing the outside restriction of timing himself to his 'other half.'
- B. Extensive rehearsal time must then be devoted to allowing each narrator/signer character combination to accomplish precise synchronization in the delivery of the simultaneously spoken and signed lines.
- C. Speed line rehearsals can be helpful to reinforce

memorization.

1. First let narrators and signers separate and work at their own speed.
2. Then put them together, forcing the narrators to follow their signers' speeded-up signs.

D. From the beginning of rehearsals it must be made clear that the narrators are responsible for following the signers' timing, not vice versa.

1. Obviously, a H-I actor cannot follow his narrator, since he cannot hear him.
2. A hearing signer should strive to turn off his hearing while he is on stage.

a. This is especially important in an Amesian production, where the word order is completely changed and where at times not one of the English words is incorporated into the signs. If an actor were to concentrate on his narrator while signing a part, he would become terribly confused. Consequently, the narrator must follow his signer.

b. Hearing signers must work diligently at taking their cues from fellow signers, NOT from narrators.

E. A narrator should start speaking as his signer starts signing and stop when he stops, but the

interior timing need not precisely coincide. Of course, it is best if it can be exactly the same, but it is not always possible.

F. A narrator, especially if he is not fluent in sign language, may find it helpful to mark certain words and signs which should coincide for the timing to work out correctly. The sign need not be the translation for the word, timing is the only important question here. For example:

ENGLISH: (Nor man nor beast nor any spirits,)

AMESLAN: Scotland man pipes-mime

(ghosts, monsters, or witches in the air can)
mean man, animal devil ghost vampire

(touch a Highland man when he's got his pipes)
witch no-matter they-all look-at-me⁴

(and can skirl terror into them).

zoom

Obviously, these signs have very little relationship to the English. Thus, the only way to get a correct timing is to repeat the sequence over and over to discover which signs naturally occur with which English words and use them as checking points to make sure signer and narrator will end together.

- G. Signers must not be permitted to speak their signs during translation rehearsals, or while memorizing. It will become a hard habit to break.

III. 'Flexible' Week

- A. This is a built-in safe-guard. It is very difficult for anyone, even an experienced sign-language theatre director, to estimate precisely the time it will take to translate a script. Allowing one week of rehearsal where nothing is planned in advance allows for the possibility that the translation and narrator/signer coordination processes may take longer than anticipated.
- B. If translation and narrator/signer coordination are on schedule, this week can be used to start giving very general blocking patterns.
 - 1. There are always signs which must be directional; that is, the direction in which the sign moves differs, depending upon where the actors are standing in relation to each other and the set, and to whom the individual speech is addressed.
 - 2. The sooner the actors can start memorizing the signs in the proper directions, the better.

- C. The author used the idea of a 'flexible' week for the first time in The Witch's Lullaby, and it worked very well being used for general blocking patterns before rehearsals were able to move into the actual theatre to be used.
- D. A director may decide to eliminate this week completely or use it for entirely different reasons than are suggested here. Stay flexible!

IV. Blocking Rehearsals

- A. Special attention must be paid to sight lines, since signs must be visible from all audience vantage points.
- B. Shifts of focus must come before lines are signed, or the first part of the sentence will not be seen.
- C. Sometimes during blocking rehearsals, when the actors are on their feet and working in relation to each other, a 'bit' will become obvious. Do not be afraid to throw out the translation and replace it with an action or pantomime; it will usually prove more successful.
- D. Placement of narrators poses a challenging blocking problem.
 - 1. It is usually desirable to have one narrator for each character.

2. Narrators can simply be seated in the front row of the audience.
 - a. This makes it very easy for the narrators to see their signers, which aids in correct timing.
 - b. This placement causes the voices to seem detached from the signers and may also cause projection problems.
3. Narrators can be placed as a panel at the side of the stage.
 - a. This allows the voices to be heard coming from the stage.
 - b. Although this may be the easiest solution to the problem of where to place narrators, it is not very imaginative.
4. Narrators can be integrated on stage in diverse ways which can add to the effectiveness of the production as a whole.
 - a. They can become attendants, bystanders or perhaps jury members in trial scenes, which allows them freedom to move on stage and to be positioned at different places, wherever their signers can most easily be seen.
 - b. They can become inanimate objects.
 1. This can be especially effective in

non-realistic plays. Narrators can become grandfather clocks, floor lamps, pictures, or anything the director can successfully integrate into his production.

2. This puts an added strain on blocking, for the narrators cannot move and must be placed in the best possible position to see their signers. Further, signers' movements must always take their narrators' positioning into consideration.

c. They can become animals.

1. In The Witch's Lullaby the three witches' narrators were black cats. This was a logical choice, for it is acceptable to see each witch followed by a black cat. It also allowed free movement of the narrators, and, better yet, solved a very difficult problem. The witches' brooms played an important role in the play, and the witches were required to have them with them at all times. It is difficult to sign while holding a broom. Each black cat was assigned the position of 'guardian of his witch's broom' which

easily alleviated the problem.

2. In You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown the narrators each portrayed a 'Woodstock' character who occasionally joined the signers on stage for a song. At such times they remained 'Woodstocks' physically while continuing to match their signers vocally. This technique can add interesting elements to a production, such as when the 'Woodstocks' became the 'other' baseball team during the song "T-E-A-M".

5. It will be well worth the extra work to develop an ingenious use of your narrators. They are often the hit of the production.

E. Usually narrators are forced to be positioned behind the signers so as to not block the signers from the audience.

1. Narrators must become used to catching only an occasional sign and still remain synchronized with their signers. Get them into these positions as quickly as possible.
2. Often a narrator can only see when his signer starts and stops signing. Proper timing can only occur with sufficient practice in such a situation.

F. If it is possible to elevate the narrators it can help them see their signers.

1. Pictures over a fireplace can easily be a rationale for elevation, but such devices require the narrators to remain 'deadpan' while their voices continue to be expressive.
2. In You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown, the narrators, who were all 'Woodstocks,' were placed on rear platforms serving as a tree.

G. If narrators become animals or other characters, they must develop split personalities. Their voices must match their signers' characters while their bodies maintain the illusion of their own characters (cats, on-lookers, 'Woodstocks', etc.).

H. Try to make use of many different levels while blocking to allow for variety in movement while still permitting the signs to be seen.

I. Do not let the action become stagnant or repetitious.

1. Keep actors moving as much as possible. The more interesting the visual patterns on stage, the easier it is to keep the audience's attention.
2. Do interesting things with the signs. For instance, have a character sign while lying

down or hanging upside down for brief moments and when the dialogue is not of crucial importance to understanding the action of the drama. Sparing use of such devices can be effective and amusing.

V. Run-Through Rehearsals

- A. Run-through rehearsals are important for polishing the performance, for developing continuity and rhythm and for getting the cast accustomed to properties and other theatrical devices prior to technical rehearsals.
- B. Properties pose special problems in sign-language theatre.
 1. It has already been mentioned that it is difficult for people to sign while holding a prop.
 2. Signing one-handed while holding a prop can be interesting at times. Sometimes translations may need to be changed to include more one-handed signs.
 3. Eating scenes can become awkward and the director may be wise to eliminate the eating, if possible.
 4. Despite obvious problems, the use of props can take on great importance in enhancing aspects of a sign-language production.

- a. An entire line may be conveyed by setting a specific use of a prop.
 - b. An angry retort conveyed by an angry flip of a cigarette or a pull on a hat often communicates more clearly than the use of a sign.
5. Get rehearsal props into the actors' hands as quickly as possible, and replace them with the actual performance props as soon as they are available. Actors should have at least one full week to adjust to handling performance props.
6. Develop a sign delivery which is slower than everyday usage. It is usually more effective to ask actors to sign larger, not slower. Asking them to slow down tends to lower the energy level and slow down cue pick-ups. It is only desirable to slow internal pacing of speeches, not cue pick-ups.
7. As actors' characters develop, let their signs develop with them. Do not force actors to stay with the initial translation. If the character analyses were correct at the time of translation rehearsals, the changes will not be radical. This development and enrichment is healthy because it shows the actors are

more clearly understanding and identifying
with their characters.

VII. Technical Rehearsals

- A. The director may wish to have ten days or two weeks of technical rehearsal to ensure that all visual elements work effectively.
 - 1. Light levels must be set and refined.
 - 2. Final props must be checked for workability.
 - 3. Colors of costumes and set must be checked for sign visibility.
 - 4. Time must be allowed for last minute changes.
- B. Costumes and make-up may affect the style of signing.
 - 1. People who are not used to signing with such things as glasses, hats, false nails or noses, etc. must be given plenty of time to adjust.
 - 2. Remember that capes, coats, hats, etc., not only affect the person signing, but also affect how many of his signs can be seen by his narrator.
 - 3. Make-up and costumes which severely alter any signing area should be worked with as soon as lines are memorized.
- C. Do not immediately assume a special effect is impossible to handle.

1. Witches in The Witch's Lullaby were required to have claws. False nails were polished unusual colors and gave an eery appearance to the hands. Although they made signing difficult, they were introduced during narrator/signer rehearsals, and were 'second nature' by opening.
2. Again in The Witch's Lullaby a backlit screen was occasionally used for shadow effects. It was found that signs were discernable in complete silhouette if they were executed towards the side of the body.

VIII. General Notes on Rehearsals

- A. Eight weeks of rehearsal is a long time. If the actors start getting bored, give them an 'exaggeration' run-through.
 1. This lets them do whatever they want to with the lines. They can exaggerate the proper readings to melodramatic proportions, or they can give sad readings where they should be happy; they can do John Wayne impressions.
 2. Narrators can sometimes match their signers, sometimes, ignore them, but they must start and stop lines at the same time.
 3. The goal of such rehearsals is to restore

joy and spontaneity. Further, some of the revelations about line readings which result from such a rehearsal can be refreshing and positive.

- B. Narrators often develop the feeling of being 'second-class citizens' in a production because of the attention which must be given to the clarity of sign delivery, blocking, etc. The director should go out of his way to give them added attention which will improve their morale and reinforce an attitude of cooperation within the company.

CHAPTER 9

PUBLICITY

Publicity is basically the same as for a standard production, although there are a few minor points which should be remembered.

I. Special Poster Information

- A. Posters should designate which sign system the production is using.
- B. It should be clearly stated that the play will be spoken as well as signed.

II. Informing the Public

- A. Publicity must be sent out early. The H-I society is a very close-knit, activity-centered society. People must be informed of an activity early to allow plans to become solidified.
- B. Inform specific H-I groups; do not depend on general publicity to reach the H-I population.
- C. If doing a play for children, send enough fliers to each school for each individual H-I child. It is difficult to organize bus transportation for children as a group unless the play can be offered during school hours. The burden then falls on the parent if the production cannot be presented during school hours. The only sure

way to inform parents is by providing each child with information which can be taken to his home.

NOTES

¹Dorothy S. Miles, and Louie J. Fant, Jr.,
Sign-Language Theatre and Deaf Theatre: New Definitions
and Directions (Northridge: Center on Deafness
Publication Series, 1976), pp. 4-5.

²Eugene D. Mindel and McCay Vernon, They Grow
in Silence (Maryland: National Assoc. of the Deaf,
1971), p. 59.

³Lawrence J. Solow, "American Sign Language and
Related Sign Systems for the Deaf," California State
University, Northridge 1973, p. 2.

⁴loc. cit.

⁵ibid. p. 5.

⁶loc. cit.

⁷ibid. p. 6.

⁸ibid. p. 12.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

King, Martha Bennett. The Witch's Lullaby. Chicago:
The Coach House Press Inc., 1955.

Miles, Dorothy S. and Louie J. Fant, Jr. Sign-Language
Theatre and Deaf Theatre: New Definitions and
Directions. Northridge: Center on Deafness
Publication Series, 1976.

Mindel, Eugene D. They Grow in Silence. Maryland:
National Assoc. of the Deaf, 1971.

Solow, Lawrence J. "American Sign Language and Related
Sign Systems for the Deaf." California State
University, Northridge, 1973.

AUDITION NOTICE

SIGN-LANGUAGE THEATRE-----A PLAY FOR CHILDREN

NO SIGN LANGUAGE EXPERIENCE NECESSARY

WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 9 --- 7 P.M. SD 111

THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 10 --- 7 P.M. SD 111

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 11 --- 7 P.M. SD 111

(The more times you can come, the better)

TEN SIGNERS, TEN NARRATORS NEEDED:

6 FEMALE ROLES

4 MALE ROLES

AUDITION MATERIAL SHOULD BE GOTTEN AT THE THEATRE
DEPARTMENT'S MAIN OFFICE TO HELP YOU PREPARE BEFORE
COMING TO AUDITIONS

THE WITCH'S LULLABY performance dates: April 14 - 24PRODUCTION WILL BE PERFORMED IN AMESLAN

Directed by Darlene Allen

1. If you know sign language and want to audition for a signing part: translate the parts you want to audition for into Ameslan, if possible. If you can't, signed English is O.K. You will be judged on expression, characterization, and sign clarity, not on your knowledge of Ameslan.
2. If you know NO sign language: think about a narrator's part. If you want to audition for a signing part, think about how you can pantomime the part you want and be prepared to learn some signs at auditions.
3. If you know sign language and want to audition for a narrator's part: try to become well enough acquainted with the lines so that you can watch the person who is signing your part while you are narrating.
4. Only one evening of auditions is required, but the more often you can come the better, because matching narrators to signers is a difficult task -- the only way is to see them together. If two people are never at auditions the same evening, it's almost impossible to match them up. You are only INCREASING your chance of being cast by showing up more than one evening.

NAME _____ M _____ F _____

ADDRESS _____ PHONE _____

Auditioning for: (1 for 1st choice, 2 for 2nd, etc.
0 if you would not accept a part)

	<u>Signer</u>	<u>Narrator</u>		<u>Signer</u>	<u>Narrator</u>
JEAN	_____	_____	MALCOLM	_____	_____
MRS. MACBETH	_____	_____	MR. MACBETH	_____	_____
GERTRUDE	_____	_____	SHERIFF	_____	_____
GORINA	_____	_____	JUDGE	_____	_____
G'THA	_____	_____			
MRS. McTAVISH	_____	_____			

Interested in working on a crew? (Use 1,2, etc. as above)

LIGHTS _____ COSTUMES _____ PROPS _____ MAKE-UP _____

BRIEFLY, what is your sign language experience? _____

BRIEFLY, what is your sign-language theatre experience? _____

BRIEFLY, what is your hearing theatre experience? _____

HEIGHT _____ WEIGHT _____ AGE _____ HAIR _____ EYES _____

On the back of this page, please tell me the times you are free to rehearse---evenings and weekends are important.

PLEASE DO NOT WRITE BELOW THIS LINE

(Use this space for casting notes about
each auditioner)

The Witch's Lullaby

PLOT SYNOPSIS

CAST

Gertrude, G'Tha & Gorina --- The last three witches in
Scotland

Malcolm Macbeth ----- A young Scottish Highland lad

Jean ----- Malcolm's younger sister

Mr. & Mrs. Macbeth ----- Malcolm's parents

A constable

A judge

Mrs. McTavish

ACT I - THE KITCHEN IN THE MACBETH COTTAGE IN SCOTLAND

The three witches enter the Macbeth household looking for necessary ingredients for a spell. It is established that Gertrude no longer wants to be a witch, but has very little hope of becoming dewitched because "It takes a plain ordinary everyday mortal to do a good deed for you." Each good deed removes one witch quality, and poor Gertrude has many which need removing.

The Macbeth family return home in the evening and Malcolm is told he must leave to live with his uncle to learn to become a shepherd. The family is poor, cannot afford to send him to school, and his uncle will pay for Malcolm's work. Malcolm hates the idea, but has no choice.

The family goes to bed and the three witches return

to put a spell on the bagpipes, for if the bagpipes are played they will have to leave their home. Gertrude is left to stop the pipes from playing, but cannot go through with it, leaving without finishing the spell.

ACT II - A ROCKY LEDGE IN FRONT OF THE WITCH'S CAVE

Malcolm walks by the witch's cave playing the bagpipes and Gertrude's sisters become angry with her because she did not finish the spell. Malcolm meets Gertrude, which starts a series of good deeds which begin to dewitch Gertrude. Gertrude is so grateful that she begins a search for the things she needs to cast a spell allowing her to get money which she and her sisters had put away to pay bail if any of them was ever arrested. It seems that if a witch is separated from her broom she would have no power to get out of jail on her own. Gertrude's search for the proper ingredients leads us to Act III.

ACT III - A VILLAGE STREET

Gertrude is slowly gathering the needed ingredients with Malcolm's help when Gertrude's sisters steal her broom. After much ado, Gertrude is caught by the constable and Mrs. McTavish and brought to trial for being a witch. Malcolm comes to the rescue and does such a good job pleading her case that Gertrude is set free. Gertrude then gets the money for Malcolm and she finally becomes completely dewitched.